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BY

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## ORATION.

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IN the order of nature, the first great division of things is between Matter and Mind. But these subjects excite, in the beginning, a very unequal degree of attention. The material world is every thing in infancy; and the spiritual part of our nature, by slow degrees, obtains, with increasing years, a corresponding share of curiosity and observation. As it is with the individual, so it is with the human race. The progress from infancy to manhood is the type and precursor of the advancement of society from a state of nature to civilization; and the changes which the man and the species are, in the order of Providence, destined to undergo, are traced in the memory of experience as well as in the records of history. The infant presents to the eye of the curious only another instance of the developement of animal life: and with the dawn of intelligence the attention of the young stranger is attracted exclusively to the perception of physical objects, and to the sense of material wants. By slow degrees, the opening faculties of the mind are drawn to the consideration of things that lie beyond the dominion of the senses. Propositions which reason deduces from simple perceptions, are gradually understood; and the reason itself becomes in time, by its own reflected light, a subject of perception. Then, rules for the business and conduct of life are understood; the relations between things past, present and future begin to occupy the active thoughts of man; and the physical creation is no longer the exclusive object of his wonder or attention. By degrees, a boundless field of speculation is revealed to the reflective mind; and the world which lies open to the senses, in connexion with subjects of moral and intellectual cognizance, becomes comparatively unimportant. Life is considered less than honor, and pleasure spurned for the love of fame. The notions, as well as the delights, of childhood are alike discarded; and by consciousness and memory only, the identity of the infant is preserved in the changes of the man. But to the ignorant, infancy is of long duration, and to the illiterate savage the external world is still regarded with the eyes of childhood. In the rude and early stages of society, corporeal wants and physical strength are almost exclusively the objects of solicitude and admiration. A precarious existence seems to be finally closed by the period of mortality;

and the individual lives neither in history, nor in the improvements transmitted to his successors. The ingenuity of Paradox has been employed in eulogizing the virtues and drawing the most smiling pictures of savage life; but to the impartial eye of reason, these pleasing colors are stripped of reality, and appear only the creation of a warm imagination. The debate is, after all, resolved into a contest between the rival claims of knowledge and ignorance. But we instinctively feel the truth, even while we own the influence of the genius that subdues our admiration; and the language that affixes to ignorance the idea of inferiority is true to the dictates of nature. Nor does experience fail to vindicate the fidelity of a distinction which our natural feelings acknowledge. Compare the inhabitant of the woods, without letters or arts, naked, or only defended from the elements by the rude spoils of the chase, and in point of habitation possessing little advantage over the holes and caves by which the beasts are sheltered, with the tranquil life of him that lives under the dominion of the laws, and cultivates the arts of peace. To supply the most craving wants of nature is the extent of active virtue in a savage state; and of those passions which virtue condemns, the life of the savage may be considered as a continued exhibition of unrestrained indulgence. It is scarcely to be conceived that humanity is capable of the degradation of the cannibal; and imagination sickens at the recital of his horrid feast. So low indeed is the condition of the human race, without the humanizing influence of knowledge, among those unhappy beings who obey no law but that of force, and know no arts beyond the fabrication of rude instruments of destruction, and pursue no higher aim than to supply the craving of the coarsest wants, that in reading the accounts which are given of them by travellers, we may sometimes shudder to think of the narrow bounds that divide humanity from the lower animals.

And yet, in his own way, each of these children of nature is capable of good, and can display the virtues that challenge our esteem. The comparison between individuals presents not so strong a contrast as that between the races. Man to man, in single combat, or in strife with danger—the man of the forest is neither contemptible nor weak; and in his own rude hut, surrounded by his patient wife and idle progeny, the hospitable virtues do not disdain to dwell. It is when concert is necessary, when the will of many is to be executed, and enterprises to which the individual is unequal are to be taken in hand, that the inferiority of people in a state of nature is most strongly marked. And here, between nations, the difference in strength where there is no vast inequality of numbers, will generally be found to correspond with the difference in knowledge and civiliza-



tion. The young barbarian may be happy, for his infancy is free from the yoke of education; but his manhood is weak, not only in his ignorance, but in the weakness of his tribe. His soul may be animated by a noble zeal for his country; but against the advance of a civilization in which he does not partake, the child of nature has no hope, and his noblest virtue is the patriotism of despair.

But it is a curious problem which the condition of savage life presents in the neighborhood of enlightened communities. To what cause is it owing, that under the same sun, darkness covers one side of the Pillars of Hercules, while all the light of knowledge shines on the other? Why should the night of ignorance rest for ages on the Caspian or the Lakes of Canada, when light is reflected from the civilization of Europe or America? Without entering on the investigation of psychological principles, we may with confidence assign, as the secondary and immediate cause of civilization, the education of youth. As in the system of nature, the decay of one body is followed by new combinations, and nothing perishes out of the universe, so in the social state, by the education of the young, the knowledge of one age is transmitted to the next, and nothing is lost from the stock of human science.

Sic rerum summa novatur  
Semper, et inter se mortales mutua vivunt :  
Inque brevi spatio mutantur secla animantum,  
Et, quasi cursores, vitæ lampada tradunt.

Education is therefore the most important subject for society; not to the individual only, but to the community. To particulars the want of education may be a misfortune, but to the state it is the extinction of hope. In vain may a great man lay the foundations of national greatness, if he struggles against the apathy or ignorance of his country. A few brief years will remove from the stage of action the faithful depositories of public power—the enlightened minds by whom the age is taught or governed, must soon give place to a new race of men—the grave closes on the stores of knowledge which years of toil and application have accumulated; but society possesses, in the education of the young, a principle of vitality that is proof against the assaults of time. The acquisitions of one generation become the inheritance of the next; the master lives in the learning of his scholar, and the lamp of human knowledge, continually replenished, is transmitted with increasing lustre from age to age.

Since, then, education is so intimately interwoven with the well being and existence of society, nothing is more worthy of careful consideration than the mode in which it should be conducted. On this subject great differences have exist-

ed, and many brilliant minds have arraigned, from time to time, the popular mode of instruction. The course of education, however, has been in fact but little changed for centuries. The study of the dead languages forms now, as it did at the revival of letters, the chief object of attention in schools of learning. To this is added, generally, some insight into ancient history and some acquaintance with the elements of mathematics. But it is objected, that of the things by which one may expect to profit in the commerce of the world, schools of learning can scarcely be said to give any information.

Seldom, it is observed, is such proficiency attained in the learned languages as would enable the student to hold a conversation in Latin with a learned stranger; and as to Greek, the idea of speaking it with fluency and purity is scarcely admitted by the imagination as a possible thing. Rarely is the student sufficiently instructed to read without the aid of a dictionary; but a critical knowledge of even the Latin tongue would require years of application beyond the time that can be spared for education. And even when all that is attempted is accomplished, to what purpose, it is asked, should a language be acquired, which the learner will never have the opportunity of speaking, except to some one as pedantic as himself? The works of all the authors in Greek and Latin, that are worth perusing, have long since been made accessible to the English reader; and the happy years of childhood, as well as the most favorable period for receiving instruction, appear to be sacrificed to the useless labor of learning to read with difficulty in the original, that which may be had cheaply, and better understood, in the translation.

As to that branch of a liberal education which has reference to the sciences, the same defects appear to exist. The instruction given is merely elementary. The methods by which such knowledge is applied to the purposes of business are seldom thought of; and the student who bears away the palm at the black board, seldom knows as much of mensuration, or building, or sailing, as persons of very humble pretensions. The consequence is, that a young man at his exit from college is as little qualified for any actual employment, perhaps even less so, than if he had never seen its walls.

Such are the exceptions taken to the present plan of education, sometimes urged with the caustic severity of wit, or elaborated with all the pomp of eloquence. To such charges, on a subject of such vital importance, attention is justly due. And here, in this hall, dedicated to the very studies so much decried, it may startle some that we should commence our defence of those very studies by admitting the truth of the allegations. But let us not be deterred

from vindicating the truth, even by the reproach of maintaining a paradox; and though the assertion may startle the prejudices of those who regard utility as the standard of right and wrong, let us honestly avow that the communication of useful knowledge is by no means the sole, nor even the principal object of a liberal education. Example proves that an ingenious man, without any of the learning that is taught in the higher schools, may rise to the highest distinction in his profession or calling, in the arts of peace or war. For what purpose then, it may be asked, are the days of the young consumed in learning that from which no benefit is expected? There is a deep purpose in it, although it may not be obvious to superficial observers. The reason for this seeming anomaly is found in the connexion to which we have already referred between the progress of the individual from ignorance to knowledge, and that of society from a state of nature to civilization. If education was confined to what is useful merely, the march of discovery would be suspended, and the cultivation of the highest and noblest faculties of our nature neglected. There is room on the wide arena of the world for the man of speculation and the man of action. The arts which conduce to the comforts of life and to the increase of material wealth, are deservedly and fitly called useful; they are indispensable to the well being of society, and the solid advantages which they confer are too easily understood to need any recommendation. But the investigation of truth, the observation of moral and physical phenomena, the study of the causes of things, and the exercise of the powers of the imagination, belong to a different field of human enterprise. The apprentice and the scholar are learners alike; but the sphere of the one is in action, of the other in theory; and men of business and men of learning have each their appropriate parts to fill. Not that scholars are incapable of business, or that the walks of busy life are never irradiated by literature or science. It is sufficient to know that the distinction is not arbitrary, but sufficiently founded in the nature of things to account for the difference in common apprehension, between the instruction that is qualified by usefulness, and that which is called a liberal education.

Nor should it excite surprise that the object of a liberal education is something besides useful knowledge. The successful student is known by far other characteristics than dexterity in the arts of gain. Seldom, indeed, is pre-eminence both in thought and action conferred on the same individual; and the habit of turning the mind upon itself, produced by study and reflection, too frequently impairs the power of observation and substitutes, particularly in the young, a fear of failure, for the confidence that antici-



pates success. The young candidate for college honors when he issues from his retreat, ignorant of the world, and occupied with books, to the eye of common observers is the most hopeless of men. Yet let not the young enthusiast despair, even if he finds himself alone in the world without friends or fortune, and ignorant of the ways of men. The light which is kindled in his mind is the same by which the world is enlightened and led. If his knowledge is not of that sort which can be successfully and directly applied to purposes of every day occurrence, it has taught him to know himself, and to understand the principles by which the moral and material world are governed. In the progress which his mind has made, his faculties have been excited by the love of knowledge, and his sentiments and tastes refined and strengthened by a sense of the real excellence and dignity of his nature. He possesses the key which will enable him to explore the mysteries of nature or of art; and, if true to himself, will find that knowledge is power. Nor will this sort of information, though it may seem to be of little use, be contemned even by those whose genius or abilities for action enable them to dispense with its aid; for probably no man ever rose to eminence without learning, that did not regret the deficiency of his education.

But by what right is utility set up as the standard of education? The things which are instinctively and universally approved and admired are not necessarily useful. Freedom from prejudice, candor and generosity, will hardly be regarded as the only passports to success. That noble disregard of self which inspires the most heroic actions, challenges the admiration of mankind, but not always secures the favor of Fortune. If it were desirable, or even possible, for society to remain stationary in point of improvement, there would be some plausibility in the scheme for confining education to a mere practical character. But since it is the law of nature that those who do not advance must recede, the progress of the mind is to be urged, on the principle of self-defence. But for progression in knowledge there is no adequate cause; nothing to stimulate the mind, except the love of knowledge, pure and disinterested. If it was valued only as it is useful, diminution, not increase, would be its order; and the inquiry of the student or the sage, would be how little might with safety be known. But it is by the restless curiosity of men animated by a zeal to discover what is new, that the limits of science and arts are extended. The progress of civilization had been long since arrested, but for those ardent minds, benefactors of the human race, who disregarding the pusillanimous, dejecting doubt that inquires what will be gained by their labors, still seek to push the conquests of the human mind into unknown worlds. When, therefore, one system



of education is arraigned for a neglect of useful studies, and a tendency to the speculative and ideal, it is forgotten that education has higher aims in view than that of merely qualifying the individual for a certain place in society. The boundless future, the interests of a rising generation, and of remote posterity, are involved in the issue. And he is worthily a benefactor of his country, who in the high and solemn office of instruction, infuses into the hearts of the young that sentiment of love which stimulates the pursuit of knowledge, and perpetuates the sacred flame by which the world is enlightened.

Nor is the time misspent which is employed in acquiring the language of a noble antiquity that has left us so many models of greatness in the works of unrivalled masters, and so many lessons of profoundest wisdom in the history of events which still fill the earth with the echo of their fame. Who but a barbarian would obliterate the memory of past ages? Who would destroy the monuments of departed greatness? But if the actions of the famous people who preceded us are deserving of curiosity, is not their language itself an object of the highest interest? When we consider what influence ancient literature has had on that of modern times—how our language has been modified by the same cause, and how insensibly the influence of preceding ages is blended with all that we see and know of existing establishments, it will not be rash to conclude that any scheme which would exclude the study of the dead languages from a course of public or liberal education, must rest on a basis of contented ignorance. Why should it be surmised that time employed in Greek and Latin is thrown away? Is it supposed that the time bestowed on metaphysics and the nature of the understanding is equally wasted? The objection against useless learning would scarcely be pushed to that length by any prudent champion of utility. Yet in what respect, except in the way of accomplishment and completeness of learning, is any one better off for all which is learned of metaphysical abstractions? And even with respect to sciences which come nearer to a practical character, what does logic teach to qualify the learner for any business or enterprize? No one will reason closely, though he knows all the various sorts of arguments by name and difference, unless he understands the subject; and to him that understands the subject, arguments will never fail, even if he should know nothing of mood or figure. Nor would it be easy for the advocate of a utilitarian plan of education to draw a line that would exclude the dead languages without narrowing his scheme to the most contracted limits. Is grammar too far-fetched or remote from the business of life to find a place in the catalogue of useful education? But who would pretend that grammar—the study

of language—that subtle and flexible implement and auxiliary of human thought, could be learned with exactness, or on principles of general application, without the acquisition of more than one tongue? The Greek and Latin languages are in fact not only recommended to us by their intimate connexion with modern literature, but they present in themselves systems of speech so much more original and regular than the modern dialects of composite origin and structure, that no one who thinks of making himself master of the subject would forego the study of such perfect models. Nor does any study tend more to enlarge the mind than that of the languages of antiquity. In the acquisition of them, the memory is cultivated, the reason is exercised, and the imagination is warmed by the perusal of those great masters, in conversing with whom we are introduced to the spirits of the mighty dead.

But we are not without example for the plan of education that disclaims utility for its only or ultimate object. Shall we scruple to learn wisdom from the very highest source? Consider the institution of Christianity. In the sacred volume will be found the wisdom which has enlightened the world, and elevates the human character to its highest degree of perfection. Yet who resorts to its pages to find the way to wealth or honor? No prudential maxims, no appeals to utility, no compromise with selfishness, deform the doctrine of righteousness. The dispositions which are most alien from the love of pleasure or of power—the fear of God and the love of our neighbor—are absolutely and unconditionally commanded. Nor does the Apostle condescend to plead for the truth, or to extenuate the sacrifice of external advantages which it requires, by pleasing pictures of a life of virtue. And yet when the heart is purified and the mind is elevated by the dispositions which religion implants, all the qualities which in a mere temporal point of view are most conducive to success—the secondary virtues—justice, fortitude, prudence and temperance, naturally and spontaneously follow. If, then, the highest improvement of our moral sentiments is operated by religion which makes no common cause with utility, is it to be wondered that the example should be followed at a distance in the cultivation of our intellectual nature?

The end and aim of education, in its true acceptance, is to give to our nature its highest moral development; and whatever is taught in schools of learning is not to be considered the end of education, but the means. At a period when the reason is still immature, and life is yet in its spring, the labor of the instructor terminates, and the youth is committed to the world where according to his own inclinations, the pursuits of business or of learning are to be chosen. The knowledge to be acquired within the college

is necessarily restricted by the brevity of time; and compared with the stock of information which constitutes the civilization of the age, the learning which even the aptest and most diligent student bears away from his alma mater, is too inconsiderable to be relied on for distinction. But he carries with him the docility that makes future improvement a natural progress; an insight into the constitution of the moral and natural world, that directs his studies in the proper way; and faculties improved and strengthened for the prosecution of great or useful enterprizes. The difference between us and the advocates of what is called a practical or useful education, consists chiefly in the various views which are entertained of the real object of a liberal education. They consider the learning of the schools as an end; we regard it only as a means. They undervalue classical education because it pays no rent; but we deny the conclusion drawn from a gross or material standard, and rely on the wisdom which pronounces that "man shall not live by bread alone." There is a higher destiny for the agencies of a rational and imaginative being than the supply of material wants; and in the choice of a system of education, the perfection of our moral and intellectual nature is the object that should predominate over all other considerations.

In the successful attainment of all that is proposed by an enlightened scheme for the instruction of the young, the end, so far as mere human results are concerned, is civilization. Of that social order and improvement to which this designation is justly applied, many various examples occur in the history of the past, as well as in the present condition of the world. These forms of civilization have had their periods of progress and decline; and in the present age, the supremacy of the Western nations that constitute the great division of Christendom, is more conspicuous than ever. The steady advance of art and science among the christian races gives a gratifying assurance against the recurrence of those periods of desolation when civilized countries were overwhelmed by the flood of barbarian invasion. And our hopes of the future receive the strongest confirmation from the intimate connexion between christianity and civilization. A religion purely spiritual has all the ascendancy of mind over matter, in comparison with the other ties by which mankind are united in society. And according to the religion of the people, such will be their system of education. It is no doubt owing to the influence of the church, that the course of instruction here, as well as in the parent countries, is less empirical, less in the nature of a mere preparatory exercise for the affairs of life, than among the polite people of antiquity, or the stationary nations of the East. Nor are we willing to concede



that there is any thing to regret in this distinction, or that the influence of the clergy in respect to education, is to be regarded with jealousy.

The improvement of the intellect is neither the only nor the principal end of education. Even when submitted to the common standard, and weighed in the scales of a selfish policy, virtue is still the highest interest. It is of more importance to the State to have good citizens than learned men. The race that witnessed the downfall of the city were not perhaps much inferior in science to their illustrious ancestry, and immeasurably above the attainments of their rude competitors in the knowledge derived from books, as well as in the arts of peace. But the generous sentiments that were taught in the schools of philosophy had long ceased to actuate the minds of a degenerate age. And experience too sensibly impresses the painful truth, that the improvement of the intellect may be carried to a high degree of perfection without the control of moral restraints. The criminal calendar too often bears witness to the union of great talents with moral depravity; and no scheme of education is entitled to respect which does not improve the heart as well as the understanding. But where shall be found any basis of morality that can be relied on in comparison with religion? And by whom can obedience to moral rules be exacted, and the submission of the will to the precepts of duty be inculcated with so much authority as by an enlightened clergy? The separation among Christians into various sects, in consequence of the Reformation, though recommended to us by all the consideration of religious freedom, deprives the State, in some degree, of the aid of religious influence in those establishments that are under its immediate control. Nor is it surprising that in this country, where the voluntary system is in full operation, the tendency to a union between the church and the school should continue to gain ground, notwithstanding the liberal provision for education made by the State. We are authorised to form the most pleasing anticipations of the future by the increasing influence of the moral restraints, on which the security of liberty and property mainly depends under the mild administration of popular governments. Experience has shown that religion can not only dispense with the patronage of State, but that it is better without it. And we may well hope that education also will feel the same healthy influence, and rejoice in the soil of freedom. The numerous schools and colleges that arise on every side, offering the widest choice of selection, must diffuse more generally the light of knowledge than could be expected from a few large establishments. Learning, in its infancy, was the possession of a favored few, and guarded by them from the contamination of the



multitude with all the jealousy of a peculiar privilege.— But every step in the progress of improvement has broken in upon the spirit of exclusion. In proportion to the spread of knowledge, the rights of the people have been vindicated, and learning has proved the nurse of freedom. And now when knowledge, like the sun, shines upon all, freedom in its turn protects the cause of learning.

A civilization that gives to all the information that enables them to know their duties, and forms the minds of the young to an habitual reverence for those duties, gives ample security for the rights of all. Nor is there a more gratifying spectacle under the sun than a people in the full enjoyment of liberty, receiving with reverence the precepts which forbid them from making that liberty a cloak for licentiousness; and intent with generous care, by the education of the young, upon transmitting to posterity a noble inheritance.

That Oglethorpe University, founded by private munificence, and dedicated under the auspices of one great branch of the church, to the equal improvement of the moral and intellectual character of the rising generation, should flourish in years to come, and rise to eminence among famous seats of learning, must be the proud wish, not only of all who feel for the honor of Georgia, but of every patriot heart in the wide bounds of our confederate Republic. But to those who receive their education here, the prosperity of their college must be endeared by a still more lively concern. And to the ingenuous youth, the students of this college, who have done me the honor of an invitation to assist in this celebration, no sentiment can be addressed more sure of their sympathy, than the hope devoutly cherished, that this university may prove the nurse of men, distinguished like the illustrious founder of Georgia whose name it bears, for enlightened knowledge, noble enterprise, and "benevolence of soul." Let them remember, however, that the labor of the instructor against an unwilling mind, is even more vain than that of the husbandman without "refreshing suns and genial showers." No school can flourish by the reputation of its teachers only. Nor will rich endowments suffice to establish seats of learning in our southern country, unless the sentiment that *obedience is honorable*, be impressed on the heart of the learner. And above all, let it be remembered, that civilization is the end of learning; and that education fails when it ceases to improve the heart, and banish ferocity from the intercourse of men.

